3   Memes

An idea of samsaric genes
Theme: How religion imprisons and spirituality liberates
by Piya Tan ©2006; 2008

" … every thought, either philosophical or religious, is interested in perpetuating itself … "
(Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1831: book the fifth, ch 2)

1 The nature of memes

1.1 DAWKINS' IDEA

1.1.1 The term "meme" (pronounced "meem") was invented by **Richard Dawkins** (1941-   ), an eminent British ethologist, evolutionary scientist, popular science writer, Oxford University professor, and one of Britain's leading atheists. His book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976), popularised the gene-centric view of evolution[1] and his term "**meme"**[2] became the basis for *memetics*.[3] The Oxford English Dictionary defines **meme** as "an element of a culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means, esp[ecially] imitation" (OED).

1.1.2 Memes are the building-blocks for "meta-narratives," that is, *the basis for our constructing ideas, feelings and emotions that are then translated into speech and action*.[4] In other words, *meme* can almost always be replaced by such words as "view," "idea," or "notion." Memes are commonly regarded in a derogatory sense as being a kind of infectious agent of the mind (a mental virus), that is, those who believe in a meme are likely to be unaware of its workings. It is like "catching" a cold, and going on to infect others with it.

1.1.3 The concept of meme, however, is helpful in our understanding as to how information is propagated within a culture, or a global network. Scientists, like Dawkins, have noticed that the way that ideas and constructs spread amongst individuals and groups follow the laws of selective adaptation that govern the evolution of species. An idea, for example, is widely propagated, not because it is good, but simply because it is a successful reproducer. A very good example is that of an evangelical religion that discourages critical thinking and encourages aggressive proselytization: it is a virulent **memeplex** (a complex of memes), in that it encourages *self-replication*. In short, memes function to make exact copies of themselves.

1.2 HOW MEMES REPLICATE THEMSELVES

1.2.1 A **meme** is an element of a culture that replicates itself. Memes do not exist by themselves in our minds. If we hold a view but do not "infect" another or others with it, then it is, strictly speaking, *not* a meme. In this sense, *not* all ideas are memes. They become memes when they are communicated outside of the host, and they further perpetuate themselves that way. In this sense, it is an element of a culture that is passed on by non-genetic means.

1.2.2 Memes, however, need not be *actively communicated*. You need not say anything to perpetuate a meme. It can perpetuate itself through external structures, through a wide range of non-verbal human activities, such as sports, and rituals, through objects, especially iconic objects, buildings, through special places, and so on. Why do we, for example, *talk about religious ideas, use religious images, wear colourful uniforms, perform strange rituals, build impressive religious structures, and generally conduct ourselves in a manner that is different from common behaviour*? We wish to replicate ourselves.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene-centric_view_of_evolution.
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme.
[3] "**Memetics:** the theoretical and empirical science that studies the replication, spread and evolution of memes. **Meme:** an information pattern, held in an individual's memory, which is capable of being copied to another individual's memory," http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/memes.html. See Blackmore 2003: 144-146; also http://en.wikipedia.-org/wiki/Memetics.
[4] More comprehensively, we need to include *silence* (not making a verbal statement, eg, based on the notion that we might we contradicting an authority figure) and *non-action* (not acting, eg, due to the belief that it is God's will).

1.2.3 Such external activities and structures are aimed at spreading our memes. The beautiful images, spacious halls, awesome domes, inspiring art, and delightful music, make people want to worship there, and so become part of the religion or group. This works very well because they easily appeal to our reptilian or bird brain: reptiles are attracted to safe hidden spots, and birds resort to the safety of high places.[5] They positively activate the limbic region of the brain, the centre of emotions, feeling, sexuality and security.[6] This is the *psychological* basis of memes.

1.2.4 On a *social* level, too, we are subtly, but just as desperately, trying to spread our memes: we dress fashionably, we go for skin care, we drive expensive cars, we tell ghost stories and invoke the gods, we appear pious and politically correct, we give entertaining speeches and talks, we use titles and status, we give away well-printed name-cards with our titles on them, we shake hands rather than anjali, etc. For the same reason, *true monastics* do not dress fashionably, do not go for skin care, do not drive cars, do not tell ghost and god stories, do not always appear politically correct, do not talk frivolously, do not use titles, do not give away name cards with titles on them, etc.[7] Interestingly (even ironically), by *not* doing all these things, a true monastic, too, is himself or herself a meme, in a good sense.[8]

1.3 A MEMETIC CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

1.3.1 While the theory of evolution applies to biological organisms, **memetics** applies evolutionary principles to *ideas,* or more accurately, the expression of human ideas. In the same way, evolving species compete for survival by replicating themselves. This process of natural selection ensures that only the fittest animals survive. The fittest ideas usually survive best because they are able to *replicate* themselves best.

Unlike animals, however, such ideas that are replicated need *not* be the best ones, or even sensible ones. It has little or nothing to do with how well the idea is thought out, but rather *how* it is executed, that it is *replicated*. But like biological evolution, too, *like memes produce like*. Sheep replicate sheep, fowl replicate fowl, fish replicate fish, lizards replicate lizards. Memes do not tolerate differences. Such a meme is best found in the God-idea.

1.3.2 The greatest meme created by the social human is clearly **the God meme**. The God meme essentially tries to explain the whole of life and the universe. As such, those desiring power find such a meme attractive, and find it vitally necessary to define God in their own way, perpetuate it, and by it inexorably bind and hold the memetized[9] flock together. Understandably, the language of *power* is common in God-religions.

The God-meme has only one agenda: to unify the whole flock into believing in only one thing: *itself*. This is the most powerful—and harmful—of memes. The main reason for this is because we surrender our individual minds to groupthink, and limit our hearts to the tribe. *The group or tribe* is effectively controlled by the second most powerful meme there is—**the soul meme**—which was of course created by God, and as such, he could destroy it at will, putting its "owner" into oblivion.

1.3.3 People fear the unknown, and so they cling to the soul meme. The former is rooted in *ignorance*, and the latter, in *craving*—the twin roots of suffering.[10] Craving is perpetuated by ignorance, which in turn promotes craving, which can be defined as *seeking for something permanent*. Craving is the silent panic that spurs us to go on hauling and tugging at what we perceive as being desirable. Ignorance keeps us going like the blinkers of an ass that keeps following the carrot on a stick ahead of it, but all that it is

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[5] On the triune brain, see **Meditation and consicousness,** SD 17.8c (6.2).

[6] This explanation is based on the theory of the triune brain: see **Meditation & consciousness**, SD 17.8c (6.2.6).

[7] A good example of exploiting memes is found in the case of Joseph Prince, senior pastor of the New Creation Church, a megachurch in Singapore. Born as "Jovinder Singh" to a Sikh father and a Chinese mother, both Malaysians, he changed his name to "Joseph Prince," which impressively adds to his "market value." (Source: Blog by Malcolm Loh, 6 Oct 2008 at http://www.blogpastor.net/2008/10/06/joseph-prince-made-from-the-same-cloth/)

[8] See the working of a "good meme" as the positive impact of a forest monk's moneyless monastic life on God-believers: http://www.blogpastor.net/2008/10/13/is-the-god-of-jesus-speaking-through-a-buddhist-monk/.

[9] This is a convenient neologistic verb. I'm not aware if this word has been used elsewhere.

[10] On ignorance (*avijjā*), see **Avijjā S** (A 10.61/5:113-116), SD 31.10; on craving (*taṇhā*); see **Taṇhā S** (A 10.62/-5:116-119), SD 31.11.

really doing is hauling a heavy cart. Yet we think this chase is pleasurable, rewarding and worthwhile, and that it has some kind of eternal essence. And ignorance is the unknowing that there is really *no* such permanence.

1.3.4 *A memetic critique of religion* explains the success of evangelical religions as being mainly because of their preference for *faith* over reason, and emphasis on intolerance and exclusivism. Non-evangelical memes, especially memes other than those of that particular group, is unwelcome. For, they are likely to displace the group's memes, technically known as the **selfplex**.

British psychologist, **Susan Blackmore**, invented the term "selfplex," which she defines as a "self" or construction comprising a collection of memetic narratives.[11] There is also the conception of "meta-meme"—the concept of memes itself *is* a meme. However, the idea that the concept of memes is itself a meme has not yet become common enough as a meme!

2 Buddhism and memes
2.1 BUDDHISM AS A MEME
2.1.1 Susan Blackmore provides a good introduction to Buddhism and memes (from her book's closing chapter, entitled "Buddhism and consciousness"):

> It may seem strange to end this book [*Consciousness: An introduction*] with what looks like a religious doctrine, when ancient dogma or doctrine cannot be what we are after. It is true that, like all religions, Buddhism has accumulated a vast superstructure of memes, including texts, rituals, beliefs, beautiful buildings, sculptures and statues, music and liturgies. Yet what the Buddha saw is not a meme. It cannot be spoken of directly, and can only be transmitted by tricks of pointing or showing, or doing something to provoke another mind into letting go. This is known in Zen as "transmission outside the scriptures."   (Blackmore 2003:402)

2.1.2 The uniqueness of early Buddhism, not only amongst religions, indeed, in practically all fields of human knowledge, is that it teaches no creator-god, no need for reliance on a higher power, and no notion of an abiding soul or eternal essence. In fact, Buddhists are not required to *believe* anything, but to examine life for themselves in such a way that they each would personally *wake up* to the true reality.

There are no memes here because the Buddha is not trying to pass on anything to be replicated. Although there is an *idea* of liberation behind the Buddha's teachings, the "follower" has to himself work out his own salvation:

> *Attā hi attano nātho   ko hi nātho paro siyā*
> *attanā'va sudantena   nāthaṁ labhati dullabhaṁ*

> The self is its own lord [refuge and saviour]. For, truly, who else could a lord be?
> With a self [mind] that is well-tamed, one finds a lord difficult to find.   (Dh 160)

2.1.3 However, as Buddhism gains wider acceptance and popularity, it quickly attracts the entrepreneurs, the social elites, and aspirants to social elitehood. Buddhism (by way of Buddhist titles, qualifications and meditation) becomes a status symbol, and Buddhists (on account of membership size, income and attainments) become statistics and commodities. The notion of karma is often misconstrued to favour the elite and the successful, since, obviously, their current status *must* have been the result of their past good karma. Status, structures, power and money then define Buddhism.

In such a sad situation, each Buddhist group is *an I-pod of memes*, desiring to replicate itself so that the group grows bigger and dominate the scene. This explains the urgency and priority given by some Buddhists to impressive buildings, titled monastics, academic qualifications, management emphasis, "modern" values, and group identity. We have become a disparate collection of *Buddhist selfplexes*.

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[11] See Blackmore, *Consciousness: An introduction,* 2003:162; also 1991a & 199b.

2.2 THE RANGE OF KNOWLEDGE

2.2.1 Before we continue our discussion on Buddhism and memes, it is very useful to have some idea of Buddhist *epistemology* (theory of knowledge), especially about what are the things we can know. In a short but remarkable discourse called **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), the Buddha declares:

> Bhikshus, I will teach you the all.[12] Listen to it.
> And what, bhikshus, is the all?
>   The eye and forms,
>   the ear and sounds,
>   the nose and smells,
>   the tongue and tastes,
>   the body and touches,
>   the mind and mind-objects.[13]
> This, bhikshus, is called the all.
> Bhikshus, if anyone were to say thus: "Rejecting this all, I shall make known another all"—
> that would be empty talk on his part.
> When questioned he would not be able to reply and, moreover, he would meet with vexation.
> And what is the reason for this?
> Because, bhikshus, that would not be within his domain.   (S 35.23,3-4/4:15), SD 7.1

The *"all"* here forms the basis of Buddhist epistemology.[14] All that we can know are what we experience through our six senses, especially the sixth sense, the mind. In other words, whatever there is that can be known, or the total extent of human and spiritual knowledge, the Buddha declares, is within the range of his six senses and knowledge.

2.2.2 Memes can only function within this field of knowing. As the Buddha declares in the Sabba Sutta, there is really nothing else, beyond the six senses that we can meaningfully speak about.[15] However, whatever can be sensed (that is, through the stimulation of any of the six senses) are by their very nature *constructed*, that is, they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and without any abiding essence. Now let us examine what really are these things that we can know.

2.3 THE DHARMA AS KNOWABLES

2.3.1 What really are memes in the light of Buddhist psychology? The fundamental fact about memes is that they are *knowable.* Memes are bits of *knowledge* that perpetuate themselves by making others retain them in their active memory. The next basic question is: what are *knowable,* or what *can* we know? This is an important question which early Buddhism is very familiar with and has a very good answer for.[16]

2.3.2 From **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23) [2.2], we can deduce that all that can be known or "knowables" are the six sense-objects or sense-data, namely, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind-objects. However, the last, mind-objects (*dhamma*), also include the respective *consciousnesses* (that is, the 6 consciousness) attending to each of the five physical senses.[17]

What is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)? Consciousness *cognizes* sense-data. Sense-experience arises through the interaction, or "contact" (*phassa*), between the sense-faculty (eg, the eye) and its related sense-object (viz, visual form) conditioning the arising of sense-consciousness (viz, eye-consciousness).

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[12] On the all (*sabba*), see Introd.

[13] "Mind-objects," *dhammā,* alt tr "mental phenomena."

[14] See discussion on omniscience in **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90), SD 10.8 (2); see also **Catuttha Samiddhi S** (S 35.68/4:39 f), SD 20.11.

[15] However, nirvana *is* beyond the grasp of the six senses, but it can be attained, that is, by transcending the six senses. But it is still meaningless to speak of nirvana, otherwise. At best, we can only use analogies and imagery.

[16] See J R Carter, *Dhamma,* 1978: 2; cf 61 f; also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience,* 1996a: 29 f.

[17] See **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16/1:111) + SD 6.14 (4); see also *Viññāṇa*, SD 17.8a (1.3).

This well-known process is called *the three conditions of sense-experience*—"the meeting of the three is called 'contact'" (*tiṇṇaṁ saṅgati phasso*), as defined in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18):

> Friends, dependent on <u>the eye and forms</u>, eye-consciousness arises. <u>The meeting of the three is contact</u>.   (M 18,16/1:111), SD 6.14[18]

2.3.3 The Mahā Hatthi,padôpama Sutta (M 28) closes with a similar analysis of the eighteen elements (the totality of the six sense-organs, their respective sense-data and sense-consciousnesses), beginning with the statement:

> If, avuso, internally **the eye** is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention] (*tajjo samannāhā-ro hoti*),[19] then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness.   (M 28,27/1:190), SD 6.16

In such contexts, technically speaking, *consciousness* acts as "appropriate attention" (*samannāhāra*), that is, the directing of our mind towards a sense-object. In short, *consciousness* is the key aspect of our mind, and is *the basic awareness of a sense-object that makes sensing possible*, that is, it allows us to have "experiences." This is the vehicle for the memes to be passed on from one human to another.

2.3.4 The Majjhima Commentary explains *samannāhāra* here as *attention arising in dependence on the eye and forms* (MA 2:229). In other words, even when a sense-object (external stimulus) comes within the range of the sense-organ, if attention is *not* directed towards the object (because we are preoccupied with something else), there is still no appearance of "the corresponding class of consciousness." It means here that no eye-consciousness would arise.[20] As such, no memes would infect us.

To understand what memes are and how they work is to ward off being infected by them. There are two effective ways of doing this: *by guarding our senses* [3.2] and through *the perception of imperma-nence* [3.3.3]. However, we have yet to examine one more important question: *how are memes created?* It is obvious that memes arise *within our minds*, but not everything that arise in our minds are memes. So what transforms our mind-objects into memes?

3 The meme-makers
3.1 THE 5 AGGREGATES
3.1.1 Memes arise in our minds through the 6 consciousnesses—through the active eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The dynamics of how memes work is best understood by using the model of **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*), that is, form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. This is essentially a model for the body-mind interaction.

Form (*rūpa*) refers to <u>the physical body</u>, analyzed in two ways:
(1) It can be seen as comprising **the 4 elements** (*dhātu*), that is, earth (resistance or hardness), water (fluidity or cohesion), fire (heat or decay), and wind (motion). These are the phases or states of matter according to early Buddhism. The internal elements that we are made of, and the external elements that surround us, are the same things: they are both *impermanent*.[21]

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[18] See SD 6.14 (4).
[19] *Tajjo* (*tad + ya*), "this like," appropriate; "engagement [of attention]" (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasi-kāra*, "attention" (M 1:445; Vbh 321). PED gives the following definitions of *samannāhārati* (vb): 1. to concentrate the mind on, to consider, reflect (D 2:204; M 1:445; A 3:162 f, 402 f; S 1:114); 2. to pay respect to, to honour (M 2:169; V 1:180). The PED however gives the meanings of *samannāhāra* (n) as "concentration, bringing together (M 1:190 f; DA 1:123; Miln 189). As such, *tajjo samannāhāro hoti* means "there is an appropriate attention," or, as **Jayatilleke** suggests, that there is "an appropriate conscious engagement" or "an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind" (1963: 433). See Sarachchandra 1994:14 f.
[20] See Harvey 1996:95.
[21] For a detailed analysis, see **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:185-191), SD 6.16; also **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 61,8-12/1:422 f), SD 3.11. See also ***Rūpa***, SD 17.2a.

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(2) Or, the body can be seen as consisting of **the 5 physical senses** (*indriya*), that is, eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, functioning together with consciousness (*sa,viññāṇaka*). These senses are each in themselves *impermanent*, as are their respective sense-objects, their respective sense-contacts (or sense-stimuli), their sense-consciousnesses, and the feelings arising with each of them.

3.1.2 The mind (*citta* or *mano*), on their other hand, comprises the "formless aggregates," that is, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and formations (*saṅkhāra*). <u>Consciousness</u> (*viññāṇa*) stands by itself, as it were, since it is the existential stage on which this body-mind dynamics occur, and, at the same time, consciousness arises on account of the formless aggregates.

<u>Feeling</u> (*vedanā*) is the hedonic tone that accompanies any sense-experience, whether physical or mental. We "feel" or evaluate such an experience as being "pleasant," "unpleasant" or "neutral," depending on how we *recognize* or superimpose our ideas and memories onto our <u>perception</u> (*saññā*). Up to this point, no meme is able to infect us.

3.1.3 Memes begin to infect us when we "value-add" or form willful notions of what we have recognized (that is, a sense-datum links to a memory of a similar past sense-datum). When we experience something as *pleasant* or *unpleasant*, we mostly have only a partial idea or sign (*nimitta*) of a sense-object. As we are caught up with examining such an idea more closely, we begin to notice the details (*anuvyañjana*) (say of a physical body) that we *like* (arousing lust) or that we *dislike* (arousing ill will).

This is when the memes begin to infect us—at the level of <u>formations</u> (*saṅkhāra*)—that is, when we add the values of greed (*lobha*) or of hatred (*dosa*). For example, when we experience a meme, such as seeing a religious building, or hearing a sermon or scriptural reading, or being told about religious miracles or prophecy, or listening to ghost stories, or thinking about some religious experience, if we have some unfulfilled need (that is, craving, greed or lust) or a sense of insecurity and incompleteness, we are likely to identify with that meme and *feel* attracted to it. Conversely, if we feel distracted or upset by these memes, on account some past bad experience with them, we are similarly infected by them, as we are still carrying the meme with us, even when we dislike them—the point is that we are *still* thinking of them!

3.1.4 The Hāliddakāni Sutta 1 (S 22.3) states that these four aggregates are the "home" of consciousness (*viññāṇassa oko*), thus:

> The form element,[22] houselord, is *the home of consciousness*.[23] One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the form element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.[24]
>
> The feeling element, houselord, is *the home of consciousness*. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the feeling element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.
>
> The perception element, houselord, is *the home of consciousness*. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the perception element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.
>
> The formations element, houselord, is *the home of consciousness*. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the formations element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.[25]

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[22] "Form element," *rūpa,dhātu.* "The use of *dhātu* as a syn for *khandha* (aggregate) is unusual; more often the two are treated as headings for different schemes of classification" (S:B 1046 n18). This usage however is found in a number of suttas: **Hāliddakāni S 1** (S 3.9, 10), **Hāliddakāni S 2** (S 3.13), **Anicca S** (S 3:13), **Upāya S** (S 3:53), **Bīja S** (S 3:55), **Udāna S** (S 3:58 *bis*)—all in the Khandha Saṁyutta—and **Mahā Niddesa** (Nm 1:198).

[23] SA explains this consciousness (***viññāṇa***) as karmic consciousness (*kamma,viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259). See S:B 1047 n18.

[24] "Roams frequenting houses," *oka,sārati.* According to DP, *oka* means "house, home; resort, refuge" (S 3:9, 5:24 = Dh 87; Dh 91; J 3:430), cf *ukka* (house) (V 1:211); *anoka,* "without a home, independent" (S 1:126; Sn 966), as n "homelessness, independence"(Dh 87); *anoka,sārī* (S 3:10; U 32; Sn 628). For other nn, see DP: oka & ukka.

The first line reads *okam pahāya aniketa,sārī* without mention of *oka,sārī,* "one who wanders about frequenting houses," nor *anoka,sārī,* "one who wanders about not frequenting houses." Mahā Kaccāna introduces these terms as implicit in the absolute construction *okaṁ pahāya* (S:B 1046 n18). On *oka, anoka, niketa,* and *aniketa,* see **Hāliddakāni S** (S 22.3,4+8+15 passim) +nn, SD 10.12.

[25] Comy: <u>Why is not said here, thus,</u> "the consciousness element, houselord, (is the home for consciousness)"? For the sake of avoiding confusion; for "home" is here spoken as <u>a condition</u> (*paccaya*). An earlier karmic conscious-

Such, houselord, is the one who wanders about frequenting houses.

(S 22.3.4/3:9 f), SD 10.12 [1.2(2)][26]

The Commentary glosses *viññāṇa* here as "karmic consciousness" (*kamma,viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259),[27] or what we might call "existential consciousness."[28] This is what sustains us in this life and holds us down in future lives. The sense of "house" (*oka*) here is very close to that of *meme*. A consciousness (say, the eye-consciousness) tends to seek out its own kind: sense-consciousnesses of a feather tend to flock together, *one sense-consciousness tends to breed another*—just as chickens return to their roosts at sunset.

3.1.5 Having said that, we are in a good position to discuss "**neutral feeling.**" A neutral feeling cannot be directly experienced, but can only be deduced from the fact that we neither like nor dislike a meme—that is, we are *ignoring* it. The interesting point here is that *we can never really ignore an experience*. It is just that we have experienced it, but choose to do nothing about it. Let us say we have spent our childhood growing up in an environment of a religiously intolerant family, then we are sent to a mission school, and we keep experiencing the memes of this particular religion. Although we have "ignored" such memes, they are always there, an unconscious part of our lives.

As such, it can rightly be said that *silence and ignorance are really no options* if we do not wish memes to infect ourselves and others. We should constantly reflect on them as being *impermanent*; for, that is what all memes are—impermanent states that try to conjure themselves up as grand mirages of permanence, pleasure and power. But if you can experience them thus (as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), it only means they are impermanent. Whatever can be meaningfully experienced has to be impermanent.

3.1.6 Now let us examine, in some detail, how to deal with memes that attract us as false promises of pleasure, or distract us with phantoms of unpleasantness. First, we will examine the psychological roots of memes, and then discuss how we can protect ourselves against memes, even neutralize them.

3.2 THE LATENCY OF MEMES

3.2.1 Why are people infected by memes, that is, to say, what are the conditions that make us allow memes run our lives so that we become predictable beings of a predictable system (like viruses that replicates themselves by taking over the vital functions of other cells). Memes are nourished and propagated by our latent tendencies (*anusaya*)[29] or proclivities, of which the three basic ones, namely, the latent

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ness is a condition for both a later karmic consciousness and a resultant consciousness, and a resultant consciousness for both a (later) resultant consciousness and a (later) karmic consciousness. Therefore, the confusion could arise, "Which [what kind of] consciousness is meant here?" To avoid this, consciousness is not included, and the teaching expressed without breach. Furthermore, the other four aggregates, as objects (*ārammaṇa,vasena*), are said to be "stations for the karmically generative consciousness" (*abhisaṅkhāra,viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhitiyo*). As such, consciousness is not mentioned here (*Kasmā pan'ettha "viññāṇa,dhātu kho, gahapatî ti na vuttanti? Sammoha,vighāt'atthaṁ. "Oko" ti hi atthato paccayo vuccati, purejātañ ca kamma,viññāṇaṁ pacchājātassa kamma,viññāṇassa pi vipāka,viññāṇassa pi vipāka,viññāṇañ ca vipāka,viññāṇassa pi kamma,viññāṇassa pi paccayo hoti. Tasmā "kata-raṁ nu kho idha viññāṇan?" ti sammoho bhaveyya, tassa vighāt'atthaṁ taṁ agahetvā asambhinnā va desanā katā. Api ca ārammaṇa,vasena catasso abhisaṅkhāra,viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhitiyo vuttā ti tā dassetum pi idha viññāṇaṁ na gahitaṁ*) (SA 2:259).

[26] See *Viññāṇa*, SD 17.8a (1.2(2)).

[27] See *Viññāṇa*, SD 17.8a (10).

[28] Ie the rebirth-consciousness, or according to Abhidhamma, the life-continuu, (*bhav'aṅga*). In contrast, the moment-to-moment sense-consciousness is called "cognitive consciousness." See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3).

[29] **Latent tendencies** (*anusayā*) or "latent dispositions" highlight the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. See Abhs 7.9: "The latent dispositions are de-filements which 'lie along with' (*anuseti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsess-sions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas,* the 7 mention-ed here are the most prominent" (Abhs:B 268). **Sallaṭṭhena S** (S 36.6) introduces the teaching of the latent tenden-cies, of which the 3 basic ones (S 36.6.8bcd)—the latent tendency of lust (*rāgânusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighânusa-ya*), and of ignorance (*āvijjânusaya*)—are esp related to feelings. Another traditional expanded list gives 7 latent tendencies, ie, (1) sensual desire (*kāma,rāga*), (2) aversion (*paṭigha*), (3) views (*diṭṭhi*), (4) doubt (*vicikicchā*), (5) conceit (*māna*), (6) the desire for existence (*bhava,rāga*), and (7) ignorance (*avijjā*): see **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(12)/-3:254), **Anusaya S** (S 45.175/5:61) & **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). Items (3)-(4) are eliminated upon streamwinning; (1)-

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tendency of lust (*rāgânusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighânusaya*), and of ignorance (*āvijjânusaya*).[30] Lust itself is a "latent tendency" in the sense that it has gained strength (*thāma,gat'aṭṭhena*),[31] that is, it has become a part of our habitual tendency in a reactive life.

3.2.2 The vehicle of the memes are our *feelings*, our habitual reaction to things (people, events, ideas, etc) that we perceive as being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and we superimpose more narratives (past memories) onto those perceptions so that we construct or reinforce that reaction or tendency. We have replicated that habitual tendency onto our sense-experience so that it is projected or skewed beyond reality.

3.2.3 The main problem with *latent tendencies* is that they blinker our views to be self-limiting, closing our minds to a broader view of things, to be deaf to the opinions and feelings of others. We are caught in the rut of a one-track mind. Such a sad existential satire is famously and humorously illustrated in <u>the parable of the blind men and the elephant</u>, as recorded in **the Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1** (U 6.4), thus,

Then, bhikshus, the rajah approached the men blind from birth (*jacc'andha*), and having approached them, said:
"O you who have been blind from birth, have you 'seen'[32] the elephant?"
"Yes, your majesty, we have *seen* the elephant!"
"Speak then, you who have been blind from birth, what is the elephant like?"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's head</u> (*sīsa*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a water-pot (*kumbha*)!"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's ear</u> (*kaṇṇa*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing-tray (*suppa*)!"[33]
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's tusk</u> (*danta*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a wooden post (*khīla*)!"[34]
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's trunk</u> (*soṇḍa*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a plough-beam (*naṅgal'īsa*)!"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's body [torso]</u> (*kāya*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a store-house (*koṭṭha*)!"[35]
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's foot</u> (*pāda*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a pillar (*thūṇa*)!"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's thigh</u> (*satthi*),[36] said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar (*udukkhala*)!"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's tail</u> (*naṅguṭṭha*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle (*musala*)!"
Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown <u>the elephant's tail-tuft</u> (*vāladhi*), said thus: "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom (*sammajjani*)!"
Thus, bhikshus, they strike one another with their fists, saying,

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(2) upon non-return; (5)-(7) upon arhathood. **Anusaya Sutta 1** and **2** (S 35.58-59) explain how the latent tendencies are to be abandoned and to be uprooted respectively (S 35.58-59/4:32). See also Abhs:SR 172; and **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14(5).
[30] See eg **Sall'atthena S** (S 36.6.8/4:208) + SD 5.5 Intro; **Anusaya S 1 & 2**
[31] SA 3:138; Vism 22.60 /684.
[32] *Diṭṭha* here also has the sense of "has understood." There is a dramatic irony here, even some sarcastic humour, as the men, blind from birth, regard seeing and touching as the same thing. (UA 342)
[33] Skt *śūrpa* "(also written *sūrpa*) a winnowing basket or fan (ie a kind of wicker receptacle which, when shaken about, serves as a fan for winnowing corn" (SED).
[34] Following Be Ce Se & Comy; Ee has *phāla*, which means "ploughshare,"
[35] *Koṭṭha* can mean "a store-room or granary" (S 1:236 = Thī 283; J 2:135, 168, 3:17, 4:280), or "belly, stomach, abdomen" (M 1:332; Miln 265).
[36] Be Ce Se *satthi* ("thigh")*,* vll *saṭṭhi*; Ee *piṭṭhi* ("back").

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"The elephant is like this, the elephant is not like that! The elephant is not like that, the ele-phant is like this!" On account of this, bhikshus, the rajah was delighted.

Even so, bhikshus, the blind wanderers of other sects, blind, lacking eyes, strike one another with their fists. They know not what is beneficial [the meaning]; they know not what is unbene-ficial. They know not what is Dharma [the teaching]; they know not what is not Dharma.

Not knowing what is beneficial [the meaning], not knowing what is unbeneficial, not know-ing what is the Dharma, not knowing what is not Dharma, they dwell quarrelling, arguing, stuck in disputing, attacking one another with the mouth as a knife, thus:

"The Dharma is like this, the Dharma not like that! The Dharma is not like that, the Dharma is like this!"   (U 6.4/68 f), SD 40a.14

The main drift of the parable of the blind men and the elephant is that we tend to look at only *one aspect of a thing*, ignoring a more complete picture of it. Most of us are stuck with viewing things in a blinkered way because we lack further information or any knowledge of it, or more commonly we super-impose our own constructs onto our sense-perceptions. Indeed, memes work best when we lack wisdom, or only have very limited vision of the truth, or are misinformed, and as such are merely tools of our latent tendencies.

3.2.4 Latent tendencies are *unconscious* habits, whose roots are buried deep below our conscious mind, out of its reach, but which are effectively guiding and controlling it, in both our waking and sleep-ing lives. They are blind to us only when we are wholesomely focussed in mindfulness practice (such as the perception of impermanence), or in meditation (such as the breath meditation), or during dhyana. However, such respite from unconscious tendencies only lasts as long as we are in those focussed mental states.[37]

On emerging from a focussed mental state, we should, with that calm and clear mind, reflect on the impermanence or "rise and fall" of our self and of things in general, for example, our body or mind, or some person, or event, or a significant object.[38] **The (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) gives clear and simple instructions on how to do this, so that we will gain spiritual liberation in this life itself [3.3.3]. The realization of the universal nature of impermanence is the basis of true wisdom. And *wisdom* is the worst enemy of memes. [Cf 2.3]

3.3 IMMUNITY AGAINST MEMES

3.3.0 Since the ordinary worldly person—the *puthujjana*—lacks wisdom, he is an easy victim for memes. The word *puthujjana* literally means "a thick or dense person, a part of a crowd," and also because he generates "a crowd or mass" of defilements. Such a person is easily moved by the crowd, and is usually unable to think for himself. On the other extreme, he could regard himself as totally alienated or separated from others.[39] Such a person sees memes as centres of power, to which he feels inexorably attracted to.[40]

It is very difficult for us to reject memes outright, as they are an intimate part of the way we think, which is further profoundly influenced by social and religious conditionings and conditions, by nature and nurture. We therefore need to understand how memes operate. Then we work on educating ourselves and others on how to liberate our minds and disempower the memes, so that we know them for what they really are: *mere impermanent facts of our lives*. There are two ways of immunizing ourselves against memes: the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā,bhāvanā*) and the perception of impermanence (*anicca,-saññā*).

3.3.1 Lovingkindness and memes.

3.3.1.1 **The roots of thought.** If we reflect very carefully over how we act (through our mind, speech and body), we would realize that we actually *feel* more than we think. Even when we think (deal with

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[37] We are free from meme only when we are truly awakening as spiritual learners and fully awakened as arhats.

[38] See **Pheṇa,piṇḍa S** (S 22.95/3:140-143), SD 17.12; **Anicca,saññā S** (S 22.102/3:155-157), SD 12.12; **Araka S** (A 7.70/4:136-139), SD 16.17.

[39] See **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1), SD 5.4 (3).

[40] See **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.11.

words and ideas), *we are deeply influenced by our feelings*. We would not be *happy* with what are doing, our work, our relationship, or ourselves, if we lack a positive *feeling* about them.[41] In other words,

 (1) we tend to be *drawn to* people, situations and things that we perceive as *pleasant* and therefore as pleasurable;

 (2) we tend to be *drawn away from* people, situations and things that we perceive as *unpleasant* and therefore as unsatisfactory or painful; and

 (3) we tend to *ignore* what we perceive as being *neither pleasant* (invoking some past positive experience) *nor unpleasant* (invoking some past negative experience). [3.1]

We are not only *creatures of habit*, but we ruled by our sense-experiences, so that we are veritably *creatures of habitual feelings*.

 On a deeper level, this points to the psychological root of all religions, especially the God-systems. **The Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1), after discussing in detail *the 62 bases for wrong views*—that is, all the possible roots of philosophical and religious ideas—declares that all philosophical and religious thinkers, no matter what ideas they propose,

 (1) they are "conditioned by sense-contact [sense-stimuli],"[42]

 (2) that "it is indeed impossible that they would experience anything other than sense-contact (*phassa*),"[43] and, as such,

 (3) they "experience *feelings* by way of repeated contacts through the six bases of sense-contacts."[44]

 Memes infect us through the way we think, especially through our reactions to sense-stimuli and the resulting feelings. The most effective way to neutralize memes, as such, is *at the point of their impacting upon our senses and how we feel towards them*. The idea is not to *like* them, not to *hate* them, and not to *ignore* them [3.1]. This is where lovingkindness needs to applied.

 3.3.1.2 **The cultivation of lovingkindness.** In simple terms, lovingkindness (*mettā*) is *an unconditional acceptance of self and other*, so that in due course they are not seen as disparate realities but as being closely interdependent. (Hate induces us to see people as disparate units or I-pods of virtual reality.) If the world is essentially a projection of our inner conditionings and virtual realities, then we are in the best position to remove those conditionings and directly experience true reality. One effective way to do this is through the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā,bhāvanā*).

 Why is lovingkindness (*mettā*) such a powerful force in countering and disarming memes? Firstly, it is *the most basic form of wholesome emotions*, which, according to Buddhaghosa, is present in any wholesome activity.[45] Secondly, it is the basis for the other three positive emotions or "divine abodes" (*brahma,vihāra*)—compassion (*karuṇā*), gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—the qualities that uplift us to godly levels so that we see godliness within ourselves. Thirdly, the best way in our dealings with others, is to temper our thoughts, words and actions (the three doors of karma) with lovingkindness.[46]

 Lovingkindness begins within us, ironically, with **self-love**, but this is not a narcissistic preoccupation.[47] While narcissism is an exclusive self-devotion in self-lust, *self-love is the antidote for self-hate, and as the ground and centre from which we radiate love to others*. Self-love is the appreciation of our

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 [41] According to Buddhist psychology, however, "happiness," is not a feeling (*vedanā*), but an emotion (*saṅkhāra*), ie, it is karmically potent, as it is rooted in one of the negative motivational roots of greed, hate or delusion, or the positive motivational roots of charity, lovingkindness, or wisdom. When a "feeling" becomes *value-added*, it becomes an emotion.

 [42] *Tad api phassa,paccayā* (D 1.118/1:42), SD 25.2 + SD 25.3 (comy).

 [43] *Te vata aññatra phassā paṭisaṁvedissantî ti n'etaṁ ṭhānaṁ vijjati* (D 1,131/1:43), SD 25.2 + SD 25.3 (comy).

 [44] *Sabbe te chahi phass'āyatanehi phussa phussa paṭisaṁvedenti* (D 1,144/1:45), SD 25.2 + SD 25.3 (comy).

 [45] Dhs 150; DhsA 128-130, 132-133. Sarah Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation,* however, is not quite right in saying that "[i]n the worldly sense (*lokiya*), each [ie, of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity] can be present in any activity" (2006: 3).

 [46] See eg **Cūḷa Gosiṅga S** (M 31,7/1:207), SD 44.11. See also **Metta,sahagata S = Halidda,vasana S** (46.54/-5:115-121), SD 10.11.

 [47] On narcissism, see **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 26.3.

being, that we have a human potential to *be* divine and to *make* others divine, or at least to be better than what they are now.

3.3.13 **Unconditional acceptance.** Just as we can feel the healing power of love, even so can others. It is this self-love and this joy that spurs us on to open the eyes of others to their own spiritual potential. It is the diametrical opposite of religious conversion, where people are *hated* for what they are and induced to merge with the unthinking tribe of self-power centering around a God made in their own image. In this connection, <u>evangelism</u>, like sex, is *the most selfish of human acts*: it is centered on an insatiate sense of self-delight and a devout lust to overpower the "other." Such an evangelism is fuelled by the power to dominate others: it is one of the most destructive memes.

While memes colonize us to inherit the mould-made minds of the memes, forging interlocking meme-chains, *lovingkindness*, on the other hand, liberates us from our constructed past of lust, hate, violence, fancy and fear, turning us into true individuals. Lovingkindness roots us in the present, the only place where our true potentials can awaken, we individuate ourselves into true persons. For, love is what we truly *are*, we can only *give* in abundance what we are: our joy, peace and wisdom.

Love can never really be asked for: *only when you give love, you are truly loved*. Only in giving away love, do you have it. It is not a thing, not a commodity, which you *have*; for, then having given it away, you have nothing, or having received them, they only crowd up your life. The gift of love liberates both self and other, merging them as lights in the same heaven. Even those who are not bright enough, not yet reaching that heaven, could still happily guide their lives by those lights. There is no greater love than this, that is, the unconditional acceptance of all.[48]

3.3.2 The 5 mental hindrances

3.3.2.1 Of all the memes, *religious memes*—indeed, *religion* itself, as a memeplex—is the most selfish of all. Religion often not only wants to replicate itself, but at the same time, often hopes to destroy any and all rivals. In this sense, religion—especially those that are intolerant of others—is the most narcissistic of belief systems, since it only wants to draw others' attention to itself, and to deny others, or at best to rationalize other systems on its own terms. In this sense, such a religion is a form of *profound psychological denial*.[49]

Since **denial** is an unconscious defence mechanism, we must make every effort to understand religion as such, so that we do not fall into the rut of a very private and limited reality. We need to humbly accept *religious denial* as a personal problem, as a human problem, one that can easily infect others, and in a very widely destructive manner, as religious history has repeatedly shown.[50]

3.3.2.2 We often construct our God, Gods, and gods, and our demons in our image. We also construct our own Buddha, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and deities according to our needs. In a sense, we must not deny our own demons, nor do we need to live with them for eternity. When we think that our Gods and Buddhas have failed to give us what we want, we helplessly seek solutions outside of ourselves, falling under power of our senses—this is the nature of lust, of **sense-desire**. It is a refusal or failure to see within ourselves (and similarly in others) the potential for good and liberation.

To deny others spiritually—such as regarding them as "sinners," or as caste members, or as outside the tribe—is the greatest violence we can incur upon them. We have laid the basis for justified and continued **ill will** towards them, and hence, it is right, even holy, to destroy these "others"! For this reason, Buddhists train themselves to learn to *unconditionally* accept others, especially those who are in some way different.

3.3.2.3 Once we relegate all our spiritual potential to the idea of a single supreme power that is outside of us —once we build the Temple of God externally, as it were—we will fall into the **mental sloth and torpor** of not working out our own salvation, but expecting an external force to do this for us. This is as if we are sick, but expecting others to find us and give us the medicine without our ever seeking it

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[48] For further study on <u>lovingkindness,</u> and the 4 *brahma,vihāra*, see **Metta,sahagata S = Halidda,vasana S** (S 46.54/5:115-121), SD 10.11. See also Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving,* 1956.

[49] See **How Buddhism Became Chinese**, SD 40b.3 (3.1); also **Gadrabha S** (A 3.81), SD 24.10b (2.4.2).

[50] See eg **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a (3.2).

ourselves and taking it ourselves. When we disempower ourselves, we stop thinking; we close the door to wisdom; we are blind to self-liberation. We feel ever and deeply tired, always in need of God's succour. We have fallen into a profound state of *emotional dependence*. Hence, it is said: God helps those who help themselves; or, put in a non-mythical way: *you can help yourself only if you really try*.

3.3.2.4 On the other hand, if we take this self-denial very seriously, and in a systematic way (such as in a polemical denial of others), we will always be in the grip of ***restlessness and remorse***. We feel as if our "souls" are restless until we have served our God or religion, often by denying or destroying unbelievers. When we *think* we have failed, or have disobeyed a commandment, we *feel* a terrible guilt, a total lack of self-worth. We have simply lost touch with our potential to rise from our self-constructed sub-human states.

The most harmful of the mental hindrances to opening our minds to spiritual liberation is that of ***doubt***, that is, the inability to look within and see the self-constructed virtual phantoms of lust, ill will, lack, and guilt. What is construed as *faith,* is often simply a deep commitment to denying that these phantoms exist. *True spiritual faith* arises when we see through all these self-constructions and memes we have been infected with.

3.3.2.5 There will come a time in our long cosmic history when we would understand *the true nature of religion*, just as our ancestors have emerged from the superstition that earth, water, fire and wind were gods or demons. Two and a half millennia ago, the Buddha gave us that liberating knowledge, but we are rapidly forgetting it. We have watered it down, severely adulterated, modernized and commodified it into local cults, privatised systems, and monetary missions, so that we are losing our best tool for spiritual liberation. Yet, if we look deeply enough, underneath and beyond all the sectarian divides, pious concoctions, and religious materialism, we might just catch a liberating glimpse of true reality.

3.3.3 Perception of impermanence

3.3.3.1 How can we catch this liberating glimpse of true reality? First, we need to have some idea of what we are looking for. Secondly, what are our tools for such a task? Answering the second question first: <u>our only tools are our *senses*,</u> that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind [2.2]. All that we can know are either *physical* (matter) or *mental* (mind), and beyond them nothing would make sense, or would at best be only speculative. More importantly, whatever is physical is impermanent, what is mental is also impermanent.

The problem is that we are often either unwilling or unable to see this universal characteristic of impermanence. We seek some sense of permanence, we construct mirages of eternity in our religions, in whatever we believe in. We have fallen into a troubled sleep, dreaming of the phantoms and mirages of our own creation. We can only awaken when we see these virtual realities for what they really are: mind-made and impermanent. This is called *the perception of impermanence* [3.3.3]

3.3.3.2 A series of three suttas on impermanence—**the Anicca,saññā Sutta** (S 22.102), **the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta** (A 6.93),[51] and **the Aniccā Sutta** (A 6.98)[52]—shows the vital significance of the perception of impermanence in the attainment of spiritual liberation or sainthood. In other words, the perception of impermanence should be applied to all the five aggregates, as admonished in the Anicca,-saññā Sutta. **The Aniccā Sutta** (A 6.98) declares that one who sees *permanence* in any phenomenon will never be able to realize sainthood, will never be spiritually liberated. This is a distinctive characteristic of <u>the streamwinner</u>—as stated in **the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta** (A 6.93)—that is, he is incapable of believing any phenomenon to be permanent.

3.3.3.3 In **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), a short but remarkable discourse on impermanence, the Buddha explains simply and explicitly *how the perception of impermanence works*, thus:

> Bhikshus,
> <u>the eye</u>   is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
> <u>The ear</u>   is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

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[51] A 6.93/3:439 = SD 12.14.
[52] A 6.98/3:441 f = SD 12.13.

The nose	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
The tongue	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
The body	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
The mind	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

This practice can be done as a practice in *faith,* or as an investigative and intellectual practice, leading to *wisdom.* Either way, the Buddha declares, we are guaranteed of streamwinning in this life itself—if not, certainly at the moment of dying.[53]

4 The Buddha and memes

4.1 THE BUDDHA AS MEME-REVEALER

4.1.1 Closely related to the idea of memes, are two well known Buddhist terms, namely, *karma* and *rebirth*. In Buddhist terms, karma is any *intentional* action of the body, speech or the mind. *Like karma attracts like*: if we lust, we are very likely to lust again; if we get angry, we are likely to be angry again; if we hold a false view, we are likely to have more false views. This is *the memetic nature of karma*.

The Buddhist technical term for karma is **saṅkhāra** or formation (or karma-formation), which is often taken as a collective noun, and translated as "formations" or "karma-formations." This is because the karmic processes occurring at the three doors of actions are not linear events, but an interrelated network of causes and effects, of conditions working with many other conditions in endless loops.

Formations (*saṅkhāra*) are mostly memories and "languages" we have accumulated or inherited from the past, even from past lives (if we accept the notion of rebirth). We are like artists with a selection of colours and brushes on our palette (our memories and languages), painting what we see, hear, sense, or feel. Each artist has a different style, some are good, some not so good. The point is that we create these virtual paintings, but we tend to live in them as if they are true reality.

Formations are powered by what lies deep in our unconscious, that is, *latent tendencies* [3.2]. Most of us are basically pulled and pushed by the strings of the past, we are autopilotted by the cords of lust, ill will and ignorance. We think we are in charge of our lives. The reality is that these latent tendencies blinker our view so that we see only what we want to see. We remain existentially blind as long as we are unable or unwilling to see. The memes of the past try to ensure that we do not see beyond ourselves.

4.1.2 Memes work best *when we look only at the surface of things*, when we banish our locus of control outside of ourselves. Conversely, when we examine our mental processes and how we feel, we begin to realize that there is a possibility of *inner stillness*. When we learn to enjoy this inner stillness, we begin to see an inner clarity, a bright light that shines revealingly into the corners and corridors of our lives; we begin to explore the attics and basements of our minds. We begin to understand what spur us on and what hold us back, our lusts, lacks and fears. We begin to understand how our senses work and how we feel.

The Buddha takes this retrospection even further back into the distant past, over innumerable lives. He discovers that we are creatures of habitual tendencies (*nati*). We seem to live and re-live by memes alone: this is called samsara (*saṁsāra*), a cyclic existence. This is *the ultimate addiction*, being caught in the rut of an endless loop of habitual tendencies.

In his retrospective explorations, the Buddha recalls being a student of past Buddhas from whom he learns the way of breaking the meme code. If memes infect us and proliferate through *extrospection* (that is, looking for meaning outside of ourselves), then its worst foe or effective antidote is *introspection* (finding the answer within ourselves). So what do we discover when we introspect, or on a deeper level, *meditate*?

4.1.3 Introspection and meditation reveal how memes work. Memes programme and propel us *to mentally proliferate themselves*, that is, through our latent tendencies. It takes only one negative thought to infiltrate our mind, and open its door to a thousand more negative thoughts in an exponential manner.

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[53] S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7). The other 9 suttas of the same **Okkanta Saṁyutta** (S25) gives various perceptions of impermanence, but with the same guarantee of streamwinning.

Memes replicate themselves within us as <u>mental proliferation</u> (*papañca*); meditation or mental focus (meaning inner calm and clarity) destroys, or at least, diminishes mental proliferation.[54]

From all this, we can see that memes are not "things": they have no essential reality, no essence, no soul: they are empty. Memes are *how* we look at things *outside* of ourselves and *project* our lacks and wants onto them, and feel instinctively drawn to be absorbed into them, like moths into a flame. As such, *self-knowledge* is the best tool for understanding memes and guarding ourselves against them.

4.2 THE BUDDHA AS MEME-CONVERTER

4.2.1 As one who fully understands how memes work, the Buddha provides us with a number of mental tools and meditation methods to disinfect ourselves from memes. Besides the intellectual tools of understanding the nature of memes, the Buddha teaches over thirty different kinds of meditation to strengthen our mind so that it is immune to memes, and also to help others be free of them.

Two of the most common and effective tools of overcoming memes are *the breath meditation* and *the cultivation of lovingkindness* [3.3.1]. Since we have already discussed the latter, we will here only examine the breath meditation, or more fully, **the mindfulness of the breath** (*ānâpāna,sati*). Breath meditation works very well as a tool for mental focus because it uses the breath, which is not only "there"—we *are* our breath—but also because the breath is a good indicator of our emotional state: the calmer we are, the more calm the breath is. We are *how* we breathe.

But there is more to the breath than just our bodies and their activities. As we calm the breath, our mind, too, clears. It is like when the turbid waters are dammed up, they stand and begin to settle, and in the clarity of the water, we see fishes and bugs, corpses and beings, rocks and gems, refuse and riches. And as we progress deeper into meditation, we tap our inner powers and higher potential for spiritual liberation. Just as diffuse light can only shine weakly, a focussed single stream of laser light can cut through any solid. The focussed mind penetrates through ignorance into wisdom.

4.2.2 The Buddha's teaching method is a very versatile one, which, to use modern term, might be said to be *client-centred*, that is to say, it is adjusted, even custom-made, for the client or seeker.[55] One of the most versatile meditation methods taught by the Buddha is **the "recollection of the gods"** (*devatā'nussati*), which essentially is a meditation on the deities or divine beings of one's culture. In the case of God-believers, for example, they could reflect on what they perceive as the boundless compassion of "God," or the ever-ready enthusiasm of angels or divine beings to assist others, and so on.

When the mind is quite focussed, that is, external and internal distractions are effectively suppressed, then the god-believer or the *devatā'nussati* practitioner goes on to practise breath meditation. This should be done until the mental focus is consistently steady so that there is a significant level of mental stillness and clarity. Then the meditator, on emerging from that stillness, regularly reflects that even such blissful states of clarity are *mind-made*. As such, they are *impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without an enduring entity*.

4.2.3 **The Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta** (M 52) explains how *mental absorption or dhyana* can lead to liberating insight. The method comprises two stages: <u>first, we get into dhyana; then, we emerge and reflect on the three characteristics</u>—that the state is impermanent, suffering and non-self—or something similar, thus:[56]

> Here, houselord, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and happiness born of seclusion.
> He considers this and understands it thus: "This first dhyana is <u>conditioned and willfully formed</u>.[57] <u>Whatever is conditioned and willfully formed is impermanent, subject to ending</u>."

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[54] On *papañca*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD (2).

[55] On the Buddha's versatile teaching methods, see **Skilful means**, SD 30.8.

[56] See also **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (9) "Using dhyana as basis for wisdom."

[57] *Abhisaṅkhataṁ abhisañcetayitaṁ.* These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the cankers.[58] If he does not reach the destruction of cankers because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma,[59] then with the destruction of the five lower fetters,[60] he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

(M 52,4/1:351), SD 41.2

4.3 THE BUDDHA AS MEME-DESTROYER

4.3.1 In sociological terms, early Buddhism, at least while the Buddha lives, is a "cult," insofar as the Buddha is the only and highest source of authenticity.[61] Of course, not all cults are bad.[62] In the case of the Buddha, he takes pains to admonish his followers and others to "check him out," to make sure even he himself is actually awakened. In **the Vīmaṁsaka Sutta** (M 47), the Buddha declares,

> Bhikshus, a monk who is an investigator (*vīmaṁsaka*), not knowing how to gauge another's mind, should investigate the Tathagata in respect to two kinds of states, namely, states cognizable through the eye and through the ear, thus:
> "Are there found in the Tathagata or not any defiled states cognizable through the eye or the ear?"[63]
> When he investigates him, he comes to know:
> "No defiled states cognizable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata."

(M 47,4/1:318), SD 35.6

4.3.2 But it does not stop there. The pupil is asked to investigate further, such as (in summary):
* Does the teacher exhibit "mixed states," that is, inconsistent in correcting himself?
* Has the teacher purified himself?
* Has the teacher been cultivating wholesome states for a long time, or only done it recently?
* Has fame and fortune negatively affected the teacher?
* Is the teacher controlled by fear and favour?

The Buddha, as such, is clearly aware of the possibility of charismatic attraction, idolization and blind faith misdirecting the follower, who would then merely see the Buddha as a meme, *something* worth replicating. If religion is about self-replicating, Buddhist spirituality is about self-liberation.

4.3.3 The classic text presenting the Buddha as *not* taking his teachings as memes is **the Udumba-rikā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25). When the Buddha is challenged by an evangelical wanderer Nigrodha, instead of rebutting him, the Buddha actually discusses the matter *from the aggressor's viewpoint*, to the

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[58] "With mental cankers," *s'āsava* = *sa* + *āsava*, The term *āsava* (lit "cankers") comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (i.e. either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously translated as "taints" ("deadly taints," RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'-āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjâsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of three cankers (omitting the canker of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

[59] "The desire…the delight for the Dharma," *dhamma,rāgena dhamma,nandiyā.* Comy says that these two terms signify strong desire (*chanda,rāga*) towards calm and insight (*samatha,vipassanā*). If one were to let go of this desire, one becomes an arhat; otherwise, one becomes a non-returner reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:13).

[60] **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are **the lower fetters** (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, **the higher fetters** (*uddham,bhāgiya*).

[61] This is of course true of all the world's religious founders.

[62] A bad cult is where all power, temporal and religious, is centred on a single guru figure. Although the Buddha is the "refuge" of the Buddhists, the early sangha is essentially democratic and socialist as a monastic system.

[63] Comy: His actions are gauged with the eye, his words are gauged by the ear. (MA 2:380)

astonishment of the assembly. At the end of the discussion, the Buddha declares that his intentions are not to convert anyone:[64]

> Let alone half a month, Nigrodha, let an intelligent man come to me, who is honest, trustworthy, upright, and I will instruct him, I will teach him the Dharma. If he practises what he is taught, then, within just <u>seven days</u>, he can attain the goal.
>
> **23** Nigrodha, you may think, 'The recluse Gotama says this out of desire to win disciples.' But you should not think so. <u>Let whoever is your teacher remain as your teacher.</u>
>
> Nigrodha, you may think, 'The recluse Gotama says this out of desire to make us fall from our rules.'… <u>Let your rules remain as your rules</u>.
>
> Nigrodha, you may think, 'The recluse Gotama says this out of desire to make us fall from our livelihood… <u>Let your livelihood remain as your livelihood</u>.
>
> Nigrodha, you may think, 'The recluse Gotama says this with the desire to establish us in the unwholesome things along with teachings considered unwholesome.'… <u>Let what you consider unwholesome continue to be so considered</u>.
>
> Nigrodha, you may think, 'The recluse Gotama says this with the desire to separate us from the wholesome things along with teachings considered wholesome.'… <u>Let what you consider wholesome continue to be so considered</u>.
>
> —I do not speak for any of these reasons.
>
> *There are, Nigrodha, unwholesome things that have not been abandoned, defiled, conducive to rebirth, fearful, productive of painful results in future, associated with birth, decay and death. It is for the abandonment of these things that I teach Dharma.*[65]
>
> <u>If you practise accordingly, these defiled things will be abandoned…and by your own insight and realization, you will attain the fullness of wisdom.</u>"
>
> **24** When this was said, the wanderers sat silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, unable to speak [at a loss for words].[66] So possessed were their minds by Māra [the Evil One].[67]
>
> Then the Blessed One said:
>
> "Every one of these misguided men[68] is possessed by the Evil One, so that not even one of them thinks: 'Let us now follow the holy life proclaimed by the recluse Gotama, that we may know it—for what do seven days matter?'"   (D 25,22-24/3:56 f), SD 1.4

4.3.4 Although the Buddha *invites* others to listen to him and to train under him, this is not a statistical quest (or meme-quest), but as a *healer* who enthusiastically and compassionately tells others that they can uplift themselves from their present state. But to do this there must be some desire to grow, to learn, on the part of the audience. For this reason, the Buddha makes this famous anti-meme statement, found in **the Dhammapada**:

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[64] On the significance of this whole passage, see SD 19.1(7.3).

[65] *Santi ca kho Nigrodha, akusalā dhammā appahīṇā saṅkilesikā ponobhavikā sadarā dukkha,vipākā āyatiṁ jāti-,jarā,maraṇiyā, yesâhaṁ pahānāya dhammaṁ desemi yathā paṭipannānaṁ vo saṅkilesikā dhammā pahīyissanti.*

[66] *Tuṇhī,bhūtā maṅku,bhūtā patta-k,khandhā adho,mukhā pajjhayantā appaṭibhāna nisidiṁsu*, D 3:57,13 ≠ V 3:-162,4, 2:78,24, A 5:188,18. See **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25.24/3:57), SD 1.4 n ad loc.

[67] Like Ānanda in **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.4/2:103). In both cases, it is obvious that "Māra" refers to a distracted mind that is unable to comprehend the significance of the Buddha's invitation. If it were really Māra the deity, the Buddha could have easily exposed him. It is interesting to see here that Māra is always dealt with the person himself, and not "exorcised" by another. This further points to the fact that Māra is <u>the distracted mind</u>.

[68] *Mogha,purisa,* lit "empty person." I've followed a safe well-tested translation here. However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, "misguided" connotes more of psychosocial errancy. Cf TS Eliot's "Hollow Men" (where "empty men" is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem.

Tumhehi kiccam ātappaṃ   akkhātāro tathāgatā
paṭipannā pamokkhanti   jhāyino māra,bandhanā

You yourself should make the effort: | the tathagatas [Buddhas] are teachers—
the meditator who has entered the path | is freed from Māra's bonds.   (Dh 276)

5 The Dharma as meme-destroyer

5.1 THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE.

5.1.1 Dependent arising, dependent ending

5.1.1.1 For our purpose here, which is essentially a practical understanding of memes from a Buddhist perspective, so that we can work towards some level of personal liberation, we need to delve a little deeper, into the meaning and purpose of life. We shall simply define "**meaning**" as relating to *causes and effects, or conditionality*, and "**purpose**" as referring to *a conscious intention.*[69] The Buddhist definition of <u>the meaning of life</u> is found in the 12 links of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), as formulated in **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2) (where each of the links defined), thus:[70]

Avijjā,paccayā saṅkhārā	with <u>ignorance</u> as condition, there are volitional formations;
saṅkhāra,paccayā viññāṇaṃ	with <u>volitional formations</u> as condition, there is consciousness;
viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ	with <u>consciousness</u> as condition, there is name-and-form;
nāma,rūpa,paccayā saḷ'āyatanaṃ	with <u>name-and-form</u> as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base;
saḷ'āyatana,paccayā phasso	with <u>the sixfold sense-base</u> as condition, there is contact;
phassa,paccayā vedanā	with <u>contact</u> as condition, there is feeling;
vedanā,paccayā taṇhā	with <u>feeling</u> as condition, there is craving;
taṇhā,paccayā upādānaṃ	with <u>craving</u> as condition, there is clinging;
upādāna,paccayā bhavo	with <u>clinging</u> as condition, there is existence;
bhava,paccayā jāti	with <u>existence</u> as condition, there is birth;
jāti,paccayā jarā,maraṇaṃ	with <u>birth</u> as condition there arise decay and death,
soka,parideva,dukkha,-	sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti	
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-	—Such is *the origin* of this whole mass of suffering.
khandhassa samudayo hoti	(S 12.2/2:3), SD 5.15

5.1.1.2 What is <u>the meaning of life</u>? According to the dependent arising formula, our life is basically rooted in *spiritual ignorance*, that is, our not knowing what suffering is, its cause, its ending and the way to end it. As a result, we are caught in the rut of generating activities that we perceive as pleasurable, but all that we are really doing is repeating ourselves so that we exist in some form: *we are our worst memes*! The Irish novelist, **James Joyce**,[71] sums this whole process poetically thus:

In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform
that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres
to the attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.
(James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake,* NY: Viking Press, 1967: 18)

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[69] For a useful intro reading, see John Hospers, 1967: 11-13 (on <u>meaning</u>), 245 f (on <u>purpose</u>).

[70] For a fuller discussion, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

[71] **James Joyce (1882-1941)**, Irish novelist, was noted for his experimental use of language in such works as *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). His technical innovations in his novels include an extensive use of interior monologue. He uses a complex network of symbolic parallels drawn from the mythology, history, and literature, and created a unique language of invented words, puns, allusions, and Buddhist themes. In *Stephen Hero* (written 1904-06, published 1944), Stephen monologues, "... but Buddha's character seems to have been superior to that of Jesus with respect to unaffected sanctity" (1944*:* 190). Numerous allusions to the Buddha's life are found in *Finnegans Wake.*

5.1.1.3 Knowing <u>the meaning of life</u> alone is only as useful as *knowing* the meaning of an expression or word: it depends on *how we respond to that meaning*. However, with a good understanding of life, we are in a better position to understand its *purpose*. The Buddha's definition of <u>the purpose of life</u>, as such, is *the ending of that suffering*, as formulated in **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2), thus:

Avijjāya tveva asesa,virāga,nirodhā	But with the remainderless fading away and ending of <u>ignorance</u>,
saṅkhāra,nirodho	volitional formations end,
saṅkhāra,nirodhā viññāṇa,nirodho	with the ending of <u>volitional formation</u>, consciousness ends,
viññāṇa,nirodhā nāma,rūpa,nirodho	with the ending of <u>consciousness</u>, name-and-form ends,
nāma,rūpa,nirodhā saḷāyatana,nirodho	with the ending of <u>name-and-form</u>, the sixfold sense-base ends
saḷ'āyatana,nirodhā phassa,nirodho	with the ending of <u>the sixfold sense-base</u>, contact ends,
phassa,nirodhā vedanā,nirodho	with the ending of <u>contact</u>, feeling ends,
vedanā,nirodhā taṇhā,nirodho	with the ending of <u>feeling</u>, craving ends,
taṇhā,nirodhā upādāna,nirodho	with the ending of <u>craving</u>, clinging ends,
upādāna,nirodhā bhava,nirodho	with the ending of <u>clinging</u>, existence ends,
bhava,nirodhā jāti,nirodho	with the ending of <u>existence</u>, birth ends,
jāti,nirodhā jarā,maraṇaṁ	with the ending of <u>birth</u>, there ends decay-and-death,
soka parideva,dukkha,-	sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti	mental pain and despair.
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-	
khandhassa nirodho hoti	—Such is *the ending* of this whole mass of suffering.
	(S 12.16,2/2:4), SD 5.15

5.1.1.4 A better known, somewhat simpler, heuristic model that formulates the essence of the dependent arising and dependent ending, is that of **the four noble truths** (*catu ariya,sacca*), listed as follows:

(1)	the noble truth that is suffering	*dukkha ariya,sacca;*
(2)	the noble truth that is the arising of suffering	*dukkha,samudaya ariya,sacca;*
(3)	the noble truth that is the ending of suffering	*dukkha,nirodha ariya,sacca;*
(4)	the noble truth that is the path	*dukkha,nirodha,gāminī,paṭipadā;*
	to the ending of suffering	*ariya,sacca.* (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1

5.1.1.5 Western Buddhist practitioners, such as **Stephen Batchelor**, have pointed out that these truths are not propositions to be believed, for if they were, Buddhism would be just another religion like any other. Instead, they are *truths to be acted upon*.[72] Batchelor also speaks of how *alienated self-centredness* is often confused with individual freedom, and that

> The aim of dharma practice is to free ourselves from this illusion of freedom. This is achieved by understanding the anguish that accompanies such delusive independence, and letting go of the confusion and craving that hold it in place.   (1997:95)

"This illusion of freedom" refers to *the view of an abiding self*, that there is some sort of permanent essence that exists within us, or without us, or as a part of us, or totally pervading everything.[73] This is either *wishful thinking* (such as our seeking for a self-perpetuating entity as an insurance against the fear of decay and death) or sheer *spiritual ignorance* (that is, the inability or unwillingness to accept the universality of impermanence).

5.1.2 We cannot define anything into existence

5.1.2.1 We have the habit of thinking that whatever we can *think of* can exist or happen. This could possibly happen in one of two ways, or sometimes in both ways, that is, through our *imagination* or

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[72] On the 12 ways of acting upon these truths, see **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11,9-12/5:422), SD 1.1. See S Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs,* 1997:4 f.
[73] See eg **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16.

through *delusion*. For example, we could imagine that **dragons** exist. Here, it depends where we are from. If we are from the west, we might imagine it to have four legs and a pair of wings, and breathe fire, and if we are a God-believer, we might regard it as evil. If we are from the east, especially a traditional Chinese, we might visualize our *dragon* to be a chimera with the horns of a deer, a lion's head, a rabbit's or demon's eyes, a snake's torso, a carp's scales, a tortoise's viscera, a hawk's talons, a tiger's paws, and a cow's ears.[74]

However, we have never seen a real live dragon, and most of us are quite content to take them as belonging to the realm of myth and fiction, where often such images are used symbolically. If someone claims to have actually seen such a "dragon," we are likely to understand that they have been *deluded*, that is, taking what is imaginary and fictional as being real and living. We are not denying that such a dragon is unreal, but that it is *only* real in the minds of the believer, that is, it is a very private reality. (The most privately limited reality are, of course, forms of madness, such as schizophrenia.)

5.1.2.2 Sometimes, theologians try to define God in a "necessary" way, that is, we should see him as a being "than which no other could be greater."[75] Suppose, say **John Hospers,** we believe that "Unicorns have one horn," but this really means, "If there is (or exists) anything that is a unicorn, then it has one horn." (And so on for any other property of unicorns.) This also implies the statement that "Unicorns exist," which simply means "If there is anything that is a unicorn, then it exists"—which is a *tautology*. Worse still, says Hospers, "Unicorns do not exist" would become "If unicorns exist, then they do not exist"—which is *self-contradictory*!

5.1.2.3 To say that something *exists* is to say that the something has *properties*; for example, a horse has four legs and a tail. But attributing properties to an imagined something does not mean that it exists. If I define a hare as having horns, it does not mean that it exists. *We cannot define something into existence!* That is as far as philosophy goes, anyway. The point is that we often try to define things into existence: this is what most religions often try to do. However, it is different if we say, *suppose* there is such a being (say, a "king of the gods") or a thing (say, a "wish-fulfilling tree"), and that they "exist" in a story, then it is clear that we mean they do not exist in true reality.[76]

5.1.2.4 For this reason, the Buddha usually refuses to speak of nirvana in any positive form. In **the Aggi Vaccha,gotta** (M 72), the Buddha, when asked by the wanderer Vaccha,gotta about the nature of nirvana, replies that it is not possible to predicate (attribute language properties) to nirvana—that is, *we cannot say whether it exists, or does not exist, or both exists and not exist, or neither exists nor not exist*[77] —for, this tetralemma (Skt *catuṣkoṭi*) are all linguistic constructs. When a fire has gone out, for example, it makes no sense to say whether it has gone north, or south, or east, or west, or anywhere—since the conditions are no more, such a state is beyond definition.[78]

5.1.2.5 THE NAME IS *NOT* THE NAMED. Human language is based on a naming process (*nāma*) in relation to a form (*rūpa*), so that such an idea is communicable to other humans or beings (such as animals). However, instead of understanding language as merely sounds and references to which we *attribute* meanings, we tend to *reify* those sounds and references. *We tend to regard the name as the named*. But the name is *not* the thing named.

The problem of reification is especially serious in religion. There are today two kinds of world religions: *the word-based* and *the truth-based*. A classic example of a word-based teaching is the opening of John's Gospel in the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

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[74] See eg Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les Superstitions en Chine* [French, Shanghai: 1911-1919], tr as *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, tr M Kennelly, D J Finn, L F McGreat, Shanghai: T'usewei Printing Press, 1914; Ch'eng-wen reprint 1966:681.

[75] For a fuller discussion, see John Hospers 1967: 428 f.

[76] On the two levels of language, see **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4.

[77] Logically, this is: *p, not-p, both p and not-p, neither p nor not-p,* ie affirmation, negation, meta-affirmation, and meta-negation, respectively.

[78] M 72,19/1:487 (SD 6.15).

was God" (John 1:1). In a truth-based teaching, words, language, even truth itself, are only the *means* to an end, and that end is *spiritual awakening*.[79]

5.1.2.6 At this point, it is useful to note that I am not saying that the "empirical" only refers to *the five physical senses*, as modern science and philosophy generally do. The Buddhist system includes a sixth sense—*the mind*, too—as part of its empirical theory of knowledge.[80] This broad conception is very useful in the understanding of how our problems arise: we try to define things into existence, and *believe* that they actually exist, which is, of course, a *delusion.* The word is not the thing.

5.2 THE DHARMA AS ANTI-MEME.

5.2.1 Parables of utility. Throughout the early Buddhist canon, we are reminded that the Dharma is merely a tool for awakening, steps in the path to liberation. In **the Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24), we have this famous sequence of clarifications by Sāriputta on the purpose of the teaching:

> Seated thus at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the venerable Puṇṇa Mantāṇi,-putta:
> **9**   "Avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?"
> "Yes, avuso."
> "And is the holy life, lived under the Blessed One, for the sake of the purification of moral virtue?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification of mind?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification of view?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification by overcoming doubt?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification by knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification by knowledge and vision of the path?"
> "No, avuso."
> "Then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of the purification of knowledge and vision?"
> "No, avuso."
> **10** "… For the sake of what, then, avuso, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?"
> "The holy life, avuso, is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of final nirvana without clinging."   (M 24,8-10/1:147 f), SD 28.3

The Buddhist training or the Dharma, useful as they may be as inspirational and liberating tools, they are nevertheless still *tools*. They are not good in themselves, but for what they *can* do, that is, liberate us from existential suffering. The purpose of the Buddhist training and the Dharma, as such, is for us to attain nirvana, total spiritual liberation, freedom from all memes.

5.2.2 The parable of the raft

5.2.2.1 A strong anti-meme sentiment is found in **the parable of the raft,** the key simile of **the Discourse on the Parable of the Water-snake** (M 22), which the Buddha exposes the serious error that

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[79] On the problem of language, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6(2).

[80] In philosophy, **empiricism** is a theory of knowledge which asserts that knowledge arises from experience, that is, we know things through our senses.

lies in wrongly grasping of what we have learnt, that is, <u>the dangers of misconceiving and misinterpreting the Teaching</u>:

13   Bhikshus, I will show you how the Dharma is comparable to a raft, that is <u>for crossing over (the waters for the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping</u>. Listen and pay close attention, I will speak."

"Yes, bhante," the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

"Bhikshus, suppose a man in the course of his journey saw a great stretch of water, whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose far shore is safe and free from fear, but there is no ferry or bridge for going across to the far shore. **[135]**

Then he thinks: 'There is this great stretch of water, whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose far shore is safe and free from fear, but there is no ferry or bridge for going across to the far shore.

Suppose I collect grass, wood, branches and leaves, and bind them together into a raft, and supported by the raft and using my hands and feet, I go safely across to the far shore.'

And then the man <u>collects grass, wood, branches and leaves, and binds them together into a raft, and supported by the raft and using his hands and feet, goes safely across to the far shore</u>.

Then when he has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:

'This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it and using my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or bear it on my shoulder, and then go wherever I want.'

Now, bhikshus, what do you think? By doing so, would that man be doing what should be done with the raft?"

"No, bhante."

"By doing what would that man be doing what should be done with the raft? Here, bhikshus, when that man has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:

'This raft has been very helpful to me, since, supported by it and using my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to haul it onto dry land or set it adrift in the water, and then go wherever I wish.'

Now, bhikshus, it is by so doing that that man is doing what should be done with that raft.

Even so I have shown you that the Dharma is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping.

14   Bhikshus, having known the parable of the raft, <u>you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more that which is not dharmas!</u>[81].   (M 22,13-14/1:134 f), SD 3.13

The Sutta's following three sections (M 22.15-17) deal <u>with how a disciple should regard the six senses</u> so that they do not become sources for anxiety through their being the "grounds for views." The next four sections (M 22.18-21) discuss internal (sensuous and mental) and external (physical and social) sources of anxiety. The teachings of impermanence and non-self are then applied to the six senses (M 22.22-29). Using more similes, the Buddha goes on to list the nature of the arhat (M 22.30-36).

5.2.2.2 Despite the Buddhist openness to inquiry (as characterized by **the Kesa,puttiyā Sutta**, A 3.65),[82] and the Buddha's admonishing the monks to be equanimous towards both praise and blame by

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[81] *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag'eva adhammā*. Comy takes *dhammā* (pl) here to mean "good states," ie calm and insight (*samatha,vipassanā*), citing **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66,26-33/1:455) as an example of the teaching of the abandonment of <u>attachment</u> to calm, and **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10, as one of the abandonment of <u>attachment</u> to insight. Bodhi, however, is of the view that "*dhamma* here signifies not good states themselves, but the teachings, the correct attitude to which was delineated just above in the simile of the snake." (M:ÑB 1209 n255). This parable of the raft is sometimes misquoted—eg by I B Horner (1950:1), Dharmasiri (1986:183)—to mean that the arhat, being "beyond good and evil" is above morality: for a detailed study, see Keown 1992:92-102. See also Intro (3).

outsiders towards the Teaching (M 22,38 f), he is very firm against any misconception (M 63), misrepre-sentation (M 38) and misuse of the Teaching (M 22.37-39).[83] The basic message of the Buddha is that *nothing is worth clinging to*, and as we reach the heights of spiritual liberation, even the Teaching should be "liberated."

   5.2.3 The Pacalā Sutta. In the conclusion of **the Pacalā Sutta** (M 37; A 7.58), Moggallāna asks the Buddha *how one is awakened*. The Buddha begins his answer by saying that the awakened one knows that "nothing is worth clinging to." The whole section (A 7.58.11) is well known as "the brief advice on liberation through the destruction of craving,"[84] and runs thus:[85]

   11.2 Here, the monk has learned [heard] that nothing is worth clinging to. And a monk has learned that nothing is worth clinging to, thus: *he directly understands all things* [he directly understands the nature of the all].[86] Having directly understood all things, he fully understands[87] of all things.
   11.3 Having fully understood all things, he knows whatever feelings there are, whether pleasant, painful or neither painful nor pleasant.
   As regards to those feelings, he dwells contemplating impermanence in them; he dwells contemplating dispassion [fading away of lust] in them; he dwells contemplating ending (of suffering) in them; he dwells contemplating letting go (of defilements).
   When he dwells contemplating impermanence in them, contemplating dispassion ([fading away of lust) in them, contemplating ending [of suffering] in them, contemplating letting go (of defilements), *he does not cling to anything in the world*; not clinging, he is not agitated; not agitated, he attains nirvana for himself.
   He understands. 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more for this state of being.'   (M 37,3/1:251 = A 7.58,11/4:88), SD 4.11

   5.2.4 Inner stillness. These opening verses of **the Tuvaṭaka Sutta** (Sn 4.14) give an apt summary of and closing for our study on memes, thus:

> **915**   I ask the kinsman of the sun, the great seer,
>   about solitude, the state of peace.
>   How does a monk, when he has seen,
>   become quenched, not grasping anything in the world?
>
> **916**   Being a thinker (*mantā*), he would uproot
>   all perception-based mental proliferations about "I am," said the Blessed One.
>   Whatever internal cravings there may be,
>   ever mindful, he trains himself to dispel them.
>
> **917**   Whatever things he may understand,
>   whether within himself or outside,
>   he would not be stubborn about it:
>   for, this is not called "quenching" by the wise.

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[82] See A 3.65/1:188-193 = SD 35.4a.

[83] V 2:110 f; M 3.

[84] *Saṅkhittena taṇhā,saṅkhaya,vimutto (ovādo).*

[85] The vocatives have been omitted. For nn on key terms, see **Pacalā S** (A 7.58.11/4:88), SD 4.11.

[86] "He directly understands all things," *so sabbaṁ dhammaṁ **abhijānāti**,* alt tr, "he directly understands the nature of the all." Here the "all" (*sabba*) refers to the 6 senses and their respective sense-objects (**Sabba S,** S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

[87] "He fully understands," ***parijānāti,*** here meaning "he comprehends, knows fully for certain." See §11b n ad loc.

918   Because of that, he would not think he is "better,"
or "inferior to," or "equal to," or such like,
when touched by various forms,
he would not let his thoughts remain within himself.

919   Only within himself he seeks stillness,
A monk would not find peace anywhere else.
For one who is at peace within,
there is no self, not to say of what is non-self.[88]

920   Just as in the middle of the ocean,
no waves arise, it remains still—
even so, he would stand still, unshaking,
a monk swells not in arrogance about anything.   (Sn 915-920)

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[88] *N'atthi attā kuto nirattaṁ vā.*

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